

And The River Cried by orphan_account

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Summary:

Mike and El act out scenes in drama class. El keeps an acting diary. It gets very real for Mike.

1. I Lost Your Love

“Please Mike... you have to accept it.... I don’t love you anymore.”

“I’m sorry El... I lost your love... and I don’t know how to get it back.”

“Mike... please, this is painful enough as it is... we can... we can still be friends.”

El couldn’t cry. If she did she would lose her resolve... but she knew Mike was hurting. The tears fell directly from his eyes to hit his knees, the knees of his jeans soaking through with the large soulful tears. His crying was tearing her apart... finally she couldn’t stand it.

She stood up... “I’m sorry Miss Itku, I can't do this any more, Mike... Mike is hurting...”

The drama teacher nodded. “You pass anyway... that was brilliant, I’ll leave you two to collect yourselves.”

Mike was still crying... “I’m sorry sweetie... “ she went over to hug him... “Are you ok?”

She could feel his head shake on his shoulder. “...not really El.”

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Three months ago at the start of our first class, our drama teacher asked us to keep an Acting Journal. She said it would help us be better actors. So this is my first entry.

We are supposed to write down our thoughts about scenes we did, how we could have improved. Writing down preparations we do before auditions. I realized that I was having so much fun writing down my day to day experiences that I wanted to make it a more generic journal. If nothing else it would help my writing and speaking skills which have always been... lacking.

So. I'm El Hopper, aspiring actress.

I've wanted to act since I was three years old. Yes, even in the lab (but that's all over and thankfully old news now) I've always been "out there". Very Type A. I found that singing and acting came naturally to me. That had always helped me get through the tough times. My dad said I should just go for it. I would get the life experience I never had when I was younger. That's a double edged sword, yes you get some life experience... but some of that is painful.

By the time you get to your second or third year of drama class, everyone's face is familiar, the people who are really serious about acting are still there... those who decided it wasn't them, or couldn't hack the emotional scenes, they had long since switched their elective to some other course.

In the third year a new guy had joined the class. I thought he probably shouldn't be in the third year of a drama class if it was his first time taking it. That's like taking the second year or third year of a typing course where you worked on speed, but you were expected to be able to type.

Last year he was in most of my classes and we'd ended up as partners on a few project nice guy... kind of cute... he didn't pay me much attention and we both hung out with different crowds. Anyway, I don't know how he managed to convince Miss Itku that he should be in our class but here

he was, so he must have been able to act.

In the previous years, the teacher would switch us around so we had a chance to play off other personalities and styles... this year though, she wanted us to pick a partner and all of our scenes would be done with that one person. Mike... his name is Mike Wheeler. He looked a little out of sorts, I think I was the only person he even recognized, so the Type A came out and asked if he wanted to be stuck acting scenes with me.

He agreed. I was looking forward to this because, while the other people in the class were ok, it was getting... I don't know... stale. This was someone fresh I could emote in front of. I had never seen him act so I'd have to react to his style and talent... if he had any.

Ok. Ok. I know how I'm coming across pretentious. I think I have to work on that. I used to have my hair long and I was constantly posing with it. Drove my dad crazy. I had an actual audition where they wanted a girl with buzzed hair, so I did that to show I was serious.

I didn't get the part, but I liked the short hair. I let it grow to a short pixie style. It stopped me from flinging my hair around. I noticed everyone's attitude toward me warmed up quite a bit.

Note to self: Stop being a pretentious wanker.

I think the drama teacher liked my acting, but she just tolerated it because I was good. At least that's what my best friend Max says. Miss Itku was happy that I'd been given an audition and said that the short hair worked for me. She was one of the first people who stopped being so cold when they talked to me.

It was quite a revelation. I must have really been annoying to people. So the teacher and I actually get along quite well now. I'm happy for that, I'm sure that's why my marks improved.

The very first class the teacher said, "Ok, first scene... I'm going to throw you into the deep end. El, Mike you're first up. You two are fifteen year olds and have been having a sexual relationship for a few weeks. El, you have tell Mike you are pregnant. Use your own names."

And that was it. There was no prep work, we had to jump right into it. We had to make and act the rest up ourselves. Mike smiled at me. My heart skipped a beat... for some reason he was looking really good today.

We sat across from each other, I started. "Mike. I'm pregnant."

Mike nodded slowly, "We've been so careful, but that one time... we were both so horny we just went for it. El... we are having sex because we love each other. The baby will be a product of our love..."

I don't know what happened to me. I started to cry. I was fully prepared for him to act as a mouthbreather and tell me to get rid of it. Giving me stupid guy excuses, but he went in the exact opposite direction. I'll admit, he sounded so sincere that it threw me off completely. I had to scramble to keep in character.

"You want me to keep it?" I continued my crying, that part was real.

"It's a part of you... a part of us... everything else is just details El. If you're with me, if we are together, we can work through anything."

I burst into tears. That was one thing I was able to do really well on cue if needed. I wasn't acting. I was so convinced at what had said... I couldn't help it. We both stood up and put our arms around each other. "I love you Mike."

"I love you to El. You'll see, this is the best thing that could ever happen to us."

Actors know when scene is done. And we were done. We both turned to the rest of the class and the teacher. Mike gave a gentlemanly bow, and I did a little curtsy.

The who class clapped. Including the teacher, she loved when I was able to cry when it was needed.

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“It’s all over school.” Max said.

“What is?” El asked. She had no idea what Max was talking about.

“Your little breakup drama scene.”

“Mike was really good... maybe a little too into it... he could be a method actor or something...” El said. She felt like she should go find him and ask him how he was.

“...or something.” Max said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Even though Max was her best friend she has a way of getting under her skin.

“Seriously El? The other thing that’s all over school is how obsessed Mike is with you. You know he loves you right?”

El hmphed in disbelief, “Go on. He’s just a good actor. We have great scenes together. I’m not sure he really wants to be an actor, but he’s making me a much better one. We aren’t even friends. We have fewer classes together this year than we did last year or the year before.”

“He sure doesn’t want to be an actor, he just wants to get into your pants.”

“Is that all you can think of? Mike isn’t like that.” Nobody would convince El that Mike was a mouthbreather.

“Really? *All* guys are like that El. You are pretty, you have big tits... well big enough anyway. I’ve seen guys look at your ass. You are going to get some rich actor in the sack and you will never have to work again.”

El ignored Max. She went looking for Mike.

She ran into his best friend Lucas, who said that Mike went home because he wasn't feeling all that well. Lucas said that Mike looked drained and defeated. Like he'd just lost his best friend.

Or a girlfriend that he'd loved very much.

2. Gray and Dirty Streets

I have seen myself in the mirror. I am an ugly crier. I don't know why after the first time my dad saw me crying he didn't drive me out to the woods someplace and just leave me. That's how ugly I am when I cry.

My hope is that he hasn't because he loves me. I hold on to that.

Today I had to cry three different times. That's not something I look forward to on a regular basis. Writing about it is almost as hard as the original experience.

The first time I cried today. I was walking down the school hallway and this girl... I mean... I've never even seen her before... I was told she's in every one of my classes. That didn't make me feel any better. How many other people exist that I'm not aware of?

She came up to me, she put her hand over her heart and said. "How could you do that to him? You must know how much he loved you. Did you cheat on him? Is that why?" She started to cry and shook her head, then ran off.

I cried a little. Somebody thought I did something bad to Mike. I like to think of myself as a nice person... I mean... I know I have faults but... I don't think I could do that...

I knew what she was talking about... but it was an acting scene... it wasn't real. I'm sure Mike didn't think it was real either. He couldn't have. We barely knew each other.

The second girl who came up to me I knew. It was Kyly McIntyre. She is one of the few girls I think is really pretty. She has jet black hair, beautiful dark eyes, and an Irish or Welsh accent that's just too cute.

And I'm sure she is in love with Mike Wheeler.

She came up to me while I was walking down the same hallway with Max.

“You cunt.”

And then she slapped me hard. I was shocked. I already knew where this was going.

“First, you shake your tits at him and he follows you around like a puppy. Then you cheat on him, with Troy Walsh for fuck’s sake, and then... and then... you dump him? Mike loved you El. How could you do that to him? Maybe now...” She sniffed, she had started to cry... “ a girl who really loves him will get a chance... once he’s gotten over you. I’ll wait... El. I’ll wait for him for as long as I have to.” She ran off too.

I burst into tears in front of Max. She hugged me when I said... “I didn’t do anything Max... we were acting. Why does everyone think that was real?”

The first girl had mentioned cheating and that rang a bell. I went back to the pages in my journal... I saw the scene.

“Ok, class, the guy has caught his girlfriend cheating on him, he confronts her. Mike... El, you are up first.”

Mike could barely look at me. He was looked forlorn he gave me a deep sigh and said, “ I never thought it would happen to me... I figured I’d just get dumped, and that was it. Instead... you cheated on me El. With a Troy Walsh? He punches me on a weekly basis. You’ve seen that.”

My silence confirms my guilt in the scene. Or does it? I tried to keep my face impassive.

“El... word got around about the mole on your right breast. I’ve never seen it.” Mike hmphed. “But now everyone knows you have it.”

“He lied Mike... but I’m not going to show you my tits to prove it.”

“I don’t care... you want to know why?”

I waited to see what he would say.

“Because I love you. I forgive you. If you didn’t, ok, that’s good, but if you did. I don’t care. If you still want to be with me... I... I still want to be with you.”

At the end of that scene we hugged.

But when I re-read it... I cried. That’s where everyone was getting that from. That was a few weeks ago, but between two acting scenes, somehow the telephone game had been played and it was now real.

My face still stung from the slap. Mike wasn’t at school again today. I asked Lucas if he knew why.

“Everyone knows you broke up with him El. He probably can’t face you. You know how much he loved you. *Everyone* knows.”

Even Lucas thought so? I had Max in my next class and told her what Lucas said.

“I didn’t tell him. We don’t really talk about you or Mike much. I’m trying to find out if he’s interested in me.”

One of the things you do as an actor... or at least an aspiring actor is that you draw from your own experience. At sixteen, you don’t really have a lot of life experience, so you listen to what other people say... about anything. For me I tended to eavesdrop more than I should. I got really good at hiding what I was doing, not being so obvious about it.

Today, I really listened. I wasn’t happy or the least bit surprised at what I heard:

“Did you hear what that dirty slut did to Mike? Mike! Nicest guy in school...”

“Fuck... she really is a cunt.”

“I didn’t think at our age, girls could be such a bitch... I was wrong. Next time I see Mike I will give him a hug.”

“Me too.”

“Yeah, I will too. He needs to know that girls out there aren’t like

her, they actually like him, and that he's not a bad person. He's cute. I'd go out with him any day."

I've heard it said that when you are sad, colours don't seem as bright. The world seems a little grayer than usual. The streets seem dirtier.

That's what it seemed like when I walked home.

I knew where it was all going. I was becoming a pariah. For something I thought I was good at... and that Mike may have been even better at.

I am proud to have read three dictionaries cover to cover and back to back.

The word humble was obviously in each one.

But now, after reading the definition... I know what it truly means.

I am humbled.

Not by Mike... by what everyone has said about him. He is liked, loved even. He's smart, talented, and let's not forget, really cute... and from everything I heard today a really nice guy... the kind of guy I've always dreamed of having as a boyfriend. Apparently I dreamed more of being an actress than I did about being happy.

I was starting to think my chance of that happening for real was slipping away from me.

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El looked for Max, she must have left school already. She ran into Dustin Henderson who she knew was also Mike's best friend.

“Dustin... did you happen to see Max in the last half hour or so?”

He looked at El. “You’re her friend, El? Uh, I *think* she made some kind of excuse to be over at Lucas’ house. He, uh... lives... close to Mike... if that’s what you’re really asking.”

It wasn’t but El tucked away the information away for later. Dustin gave her directions to Maple street.

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She knocked on the Sinclair’s front door and Mrs. Sinclair answered. “Hi, Mrs. Sinclair, I’m looking for my friend Max? I heard she might be here?”

“They are in the basement honey... go on down.”

As soon as El saw Max her blubbering started. Max pulled her into a hug.

“What’s wrong El?”

“Ev-ev-everything.”

It took El a few minutes to explain everything that had happened. It was Lucas who said.

“But that was just the scene you guys were doing right?”

“Everyone th-thinks it was real... “ El said. She sounded like she was pleading with Max and Lucas.

“You know... Mike just lives over there.” Lucas pointed at a wall. “Why don’t you see what he thinks... or how he feels.”

Max turned to Lucas, her shoulders slumped... "Lucas... Mike feels the same way about El as I do about you."

Silence.

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I was too scared to go over to Mike's. What was I going to say? I didn't even know exactly how I felt about him. I mean... I had a good idea, but a girl has to protect her heart. I don't know how guy's feel, but a girl tends to completely give her heart to a guy when they are a couple. It's probably why we cry more during breakups.

Everyone already thought I broke up with him, first I cheated and then I broke up. Mike didn't know all that of course, he hadn't been in school yesterday. He was also in the same scenes, so he knew it wasn't real.

He had... he had just acted if they were.

3. Hoping That We'd Meet

I got lucky. I skipped all my classes today and I didn't get caught. I thought of Mike all day, I walked the hallways hoping that we'd meet.

I recognized the stare I got from every single girl who looked at me. It was the "Evil Bitch" look. All girls know it. I think I've even given that look to a girl a few times.

It's much worse when you are on the receiving end.

Much worse.

I only ran into one girl the entire day. As it turned out... I think it was the worst day of my life.

She came up to me and said, " Don't worry El, once you're a rich and famous actress you no longer have to worry about the only heart that loved you... and that you stomped on... You'll be ok. Self centered bitches always are."

I collapsed on my knees and cried until Miss Itku came along and took me to her office.

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"Can I tell you something?" Miss Itku said.

El gave a tiny shrug. She didn't care.

"You are experiencing what it's like to be a really good actress. People can't separate you from your character."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"You want to be an actress... right?"

"The price is too high. Everyone hates me. I can't even talk to the guy that everyone says loves me. I feel like a worthless piece of shit."

The teacher was silent... finally she said. "What do you want to do?"

"I can tell you what I *don't* want to do... I don't want to act."

"For heaven's sake... why not?"

"Acting like you are in love... it's not the same thing as being in love. I think someone loves me more than he can even put into words. He just cried when I told him I didn't love him."

"But that wasn't real, El, you were two were doing a scene. One that was required and one that you both brilliantly pulled off. You should be happy."

"I hurt someone's feelings Miss Itku. I don't feel happy about that at all. Not only that... but... I think I want to return those feelings. I think I may have missed out on the best thing that's ever going to happen to me. I'm miserable."

El cried again. The teacher would never understand. Never understand what it was like to make someone feel that bad.

El got up and ran home.

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After my talk with Miss Itku I can't stop crying. I don't even really know Mike but I feel bad about hurting him? Seriously El. What's that about? I don't even know him enough to have any feelings about him. I don't really know him at all. I am just getting your information from what other people say. Sure, they are saying things about me that aren't true. So what if Mike is actually an asshole? I mean, I don't believe it, but...

I made a decision then.

I would get to know Mike. Find out if he walked on water like everyone thought he did. I was going into this with a bad attitude... I knew that... something was there... I don't know if I can put it into words...

I think there is something there between us.

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El was late to her next class, it had already started so the halls were empty. She wasn't in any hurry to get to her next class.

Mike wasn't in it anyway.

No sooner had she thought that when she saw him walking towards her in the hallway.

"Hey El! Have you heard?"

El felt the glow in her heart. She smirked. "Stuff I've heard hasn't been flattering..."

“Oh, that... yeah... sorry about that. I’ve been correcting people as I talk to them, it’s a little tough for me because I’m not that extroverted... which is... uh... nevermind... no... this is about our next scene...”

“I’m not sure I want to do another scene with you Mike...”

“Oh?” He hung his head... “am I that bad an actor?”

“Noo, Mike... noo. You are really good. I think that’s why the rumours are out there.”

“I’m not in your league El. I have no doubt you are going to be at the podium... well at least virtually anyway.” He shrugged. “It’s supposed to be a surprise and the most challenging scene yet. I thought we’d at least give it a try. I heard that not everyone is going to get to do it.”

“Oh?” That sparked El’s curiosity. All the partners got to do all the scenes. She wondered what was up. She wanted to change the subject though.

“How are you feeling?”

“I felt really crappy before we did our scene... some of that wasn’t acting.” El’s heart sunk. It wasn’t acting?

“But you were really crying!”

“That was real... um... you know... drawing from personal experience... and all that...”

“I’m sorry Mike. I didn’t know you’d ever been dumped.”

“Ha! That’s a laugh. You have to have a girlfriend first. I just imagined it would be a lot like that... and besides... you are really good with emotional cues and ad libbing. You make the class much less scary for me.”

“That’s always had me curious Mike. What prompted an introvert... I... just assumed you were... to take a drama class...”

Mike gave her a look that El didn't understand. His shoulders kind of drooped.

The fire alarm bell went off.

They looked where they were moved towards the proper emergency exit for that hallway.

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Other than drama class, I think that's the longest conversation I've had with Mike.

It was good. Felt like a real conversation. Well, there I go, thinking of how it will make me a better actress...

Ever since our last scene, I've been bundling up my girls a little more. Last thing I need is someone looking at my cleavage and thinking I'm a slut. Been there done that.

I'm a little worried about the next scene. It's supposed to be challenging. I know. I know. The last was draining for Mike and I, but I think I've decided I'm going to do it.

I wanted to let Mike know right away.

I didn't have his cell phone number so I looked him up in the phone book. There were two entries. I called the first one.

"Hello... Nancy speaking."

Nancy?

"I'd like to speak to Mike Wheeler please?"

"You want the other number. I'm his older sister. May I ask who's

calling?”

“El Hopper. I’m his drama class partner.”

“That explains a lot. I’ve been through the same kind of thing. It’ll pass El... and if... I don’t mean to assume... but if you two actually start dating... well... my brother can be a little asshole sometimes... but he’d never treat a girl badly. It’s just not in him to do that.”

I had to laugh to myself, this is the first time I’ve heard Mike referred to something unkind. It was from his sister so you always had to take that kind of comment with a grain of salt.

“Hello may I speak to Mike please?” I called the second number.

“Sure, who’s calling?” *The voice sounded like it might be his mother.*

“I’m El Hopper, I’m his drama class partner.”

There was a muffled sound of the handset being covered. “Mike... pick up the phone, it’s for school.”

I waited a minute.

“Hello?”

“Hi Mike... El... “

“El? What are you calling my home phone? You could call my cell.”

“I don’t have it.”

“Oh.” *He gave me his number!*

“Mike, I’m nervous but I’ve decided I want to do the mystery scene with you. Are you still ok to do it?”

“I think I’m more nervous than you are. What if it’s a nude scene or something?”

I laughed. “Mike. I’m almost positive they won’t make us take our clothes off in class.”

"I guess when you put it that way. There's only one other scene that I don't think I can do... not with you anyway."

"What's that?"

"I can't do any kind of scene where I'm hurting you even if it's just acting . Like an abuse scene or something... I draw the line there. Sorry if that's what it turns out to be."

"Mike... I understand."

He doesn't want to hurt me. Not even pretend. I'm starting to think he's too good to be true.

What if we end up together and he turns out to be a complete asshole in private? That all he wants to do is feel me up or just get in my pants? What am I going to do then? Everyone thinks he's beyond perfect.

Shit.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

Whoa El... reign it in there. You've already got some asshole trying to get his hand up your sweater and you've barely talked to him for more than two minutes at any one time.

Let's just get through the scene.

How bad can it be?

4. For My Lonely Soul

“Ok, class make your way, follow the yellow gaffer’s tape, line up along the red gaffer’s tape.” Miss Itku was in complete control. Her voice sounded... different.

“Ok... quiet while I explain what’s going on. With the generous help from the Hawkins AV department, more specifically Dustin Henderson and Lucas Sinclair who set everything up, we are going to film this scene.”

“That’s the first part of challenge I’ve set for you. You’ll notice in white gaffer’s tape... in a circle apparently done by a geometric savant, that circle is divided in two by red gaffers tape. Each actor will stand on each side of that circle. Those are your marks. The shot is blocked for you to be inside that circle on your half.”

“As you can see outside of that circle are what look like mini-rail road tracks. Those are for the cameras, All four cameras will be rotating around you while you act out the scene. We also have a budding editor in the AV class, Max Mayfield, she will be working with Dustin and Lucas all next week to edit the takes from the four cameras.”

A hand went up. “Uh, Miss Itku? What’s the scene?”

“I’m getting to that... patience...” The crowd laughed... and it *was* a crowd by now, there had to be two-hundred and fifty people looking towards the stage.

“As actors you will eventually work with an asshole director. For this scene *I* will be your asshole director. The students laughed again.

That was when El noticed that there weren’t just students there, there were teachers, a *lot* of girls were there. Including Kyly.

“The next part of the challenge is that there are no lines. You need to act with your faces, for at least ten seconds... you will be cued... before the scene starts. You will know when your ten seconds starts *and* what your scene will be when the clapperboard closes. At a random interval I’m going to yell cut, at least twice, and you have to do the scene again... same emotion as the first time.”

“Only Mike and El are here? Where’s the rest of the class?”

“I have a PA that’s going to get them from the green room. I wanted it to be a secret till the last second.”

“Ok... El? Mike? You two are up first.

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I asked Mike if he was nervous and he said “only a little. I’m doing the scene with you, I trust you and I know we work well together. You?”

“Fear of the unknown.” I told him.

“Yeah, that is the mind killer. We’ll be ok. I promise.”

I’m not sure how Mike could promise, but it made me feel better. I realized that I trusted him too.

“Remember you two, face acting first, until your cue.” Miss Itku reminded us.

Someone I hadn’t seen before said. “Scene 1 Take 1. Mike and El... kiss.”

The clapper was like a gunshot. Kiss?!

Miss Itku said, as a director, “You’ve been in a relationship for a few days, you realize that you are soulmates, you look at each other until you can’t help it. This is your first kiss.”

Mike reached out his hands to me and I took them. His dark eyes stared into mine. Oh my God... he was looking at me like he loved me! I mean... I know he was acting... wasn't he? I half smiled at him in the scene... I moved a little closer, he started to tilt his head.

"...and three, two, one. Kiss!"

I parted my lips and closed my eyes. It was really going to happen! Mike was going to be my first kiss!

I will write it down right now. That was the sweetest kiss I've ever had in my life. We were both into it, I could almost feel the question on his tongue, he must have felt the 'yes' on mine. I pressed myself up against him. My heart was pounding. His was too, I could feel his heartbeat on my right breast. Our tongues were very gentle with each other.

I swear that his next question from his tongue was 'where's the cue'. No sooner had we both instinctively decided on a deeper kiss when the screech hit our ears.

"Cuuuuuuuuut!"

"For fucks sake you two, no tonsil hockey, it's your first kiss. Do it again. Don't fuck it up." I'm sure that was supposed to be the asshole director part.

"Scene 1 Take 2, Mike and El kiss." The clapper seemed even louder than the first time.

Mike did it again! He told me he loved me with his eyes. I tried to do the same with mine, and my smile.

He tilted his head again as I started to close in. I put my hands on his shoulders, and he put his on my waist. It was different from the first take, and I half expected the teacher to yell cut again. We parted our lips and closed our eyes. Our lips found each other. We didn't need our tongues. Mike was a very good kisser, but this time... I don't know. It's like we wanted the sweetness to come through, not the hunger. His lips were so soft. I didn't want it to end.

We must have kissed for well over a minute. There was no second cut.

Everyone in the room was quiet. Mike and I just kept kissing. That's what you are supposed to do as an actor. Actors don't end the scene, the director does. You keep going... I don't know about him but I was enjoying the kiss. I could have kissed him for a lot longer. He was kissing me like he loved me. Can that be acted? It's physical. I couldn't imagine what he was drawing on to kiss me like that.

Is it cliché to say that I will remember that kiss forever? Way beyond my time on this earth.

That's how it felt. Maybe that's how soulmates kiss? Mike made me feel like that twice in a row. He was perfect for my lonely soul.

He was either a really good actor... or... or...

He loved me.

Finally the director said in a soft voice. "Cut. I think we can all agree that's a take. That was beautiful, you two."

There was quiet clapping. I could swear I heard a girl crying... I think that girl was Kyly.

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There was all kinds of commotion as the setup for the next pair of actors took place.

Mike and El walked back to the seats, he leaned over and half whispered, "Um... sorry about the tongue El. It just felt right at the time."

"It was right. You didn't hear me complain."

Mike looked down, a half smile on his face.

“It was my first kiss.” They both said it at the exact same time.

“At least you weren’t grossed out by it.” Mike said. “I had no idea what I was doing.”

“I wasn’t. You are a good kisser Mike. ”

He shrugged. “I noticed the teacher didn’t yell cut a second time. I’m going to guess we passed that assignment. Not sure I want to see myself on screen though. At least not with...” Mike went silent.

“Dustin said he’d give us DVD copies... for our portfolio. Would you watch it with me? I want us to be subjective about it.”

“You mean objective?”

“No I mean *sub* jective. I want us to both pick it apart, discuss what we could do better.”

“If it would help you El, I will. I don’t think I’ll take drama next year. I didn’t realize how much of an emotional toll it’s taking on me. I was literally sick the last two days after the breakup scene. I um... have a hard time separating myself from the little bit of the characters we play. I wanted to thank you for asking me if I was ok. That actually helped a lot.”

El pressed her lips together, she looked away quickly.

“My dad is waiting for me. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

El ran to the school entrance.

XXXXXX

"My dad is waiting for me?" That should go down as one of the lamest excuses ever.

As it turns out I won't see Mike tomorrow anyway. My cramps are bad this time. I had to phone the school nurse so she could let my teachers know.

I know that after this crampastic night, my hormones are going to screw with me. I asked my dad if Max and I could have a sleepover... but at the cabin. Max would drive us there.

At least if I was really bitchy, Max would be the perfect sounding board and not take any shit from me.

Max is my best friend.

XXXXXX

"Could you go over a few more bumps Max? I don't feel quite pukey enough."

"Sorry, this car has practically no suspension. Hand me down from Billy. Shit, are you going to be a bitch the entire time we are out there?"

"Probably. You have a problem with that, cunt?" El laughed hoping that Max thought it was funny.

"Ok, touche... I have something to help."

"Oh, what's that?"

"A magnum of white wine. It won't give you a headache. I shamed my brother into buying it for me. I still can't pass for twenty-one yet."

"I already feel sick Max, I don't really want a hangover to go with it."

"Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, and a very good muscle relaxer. You don't have to drink till you puke. Just exercise a little control."

"Said the Puke Queen herself. Remember last time we did this?"

"Yes. I think I whined about Lucas all night. No pun intended."

"I don't know why you just don't ask him out. This is the time for women."

"I'm a little scared to." Max said, her voice taking on a sad note. "What if he doesn't want to be with a white girl? Or me... at all?"

"First off, I don't think he cares about colour, that's not a thing for people our age.. Second. I've seen him look at your ass. He's interested. In your ass anyway. Why don't you give him a piece." El giggled.

"Oh, your funny El. Why haven't you shown Mike your tits yet?"

"We don't have that kind of relationship." El said. Her own voice dropping a little.

"I have bad news for you girl. You don't have *any* relationship with him."

El sighed. After a few minutes of silence she said, "Have you had a chance to look at any of that footage from our take?"

"Just a quick look. You two are really sweet together as an editor you gave Dustin and I a lot of material to work with. . I don't know why Mike doesn't ask you out."

"What about the other two groups?"

"One group was a no-show. They left the green room, I've heard they really can't stand each other. The other group, meh, they were ok. The teacher really likes you and Mike though. I think she's coming up with these scenes just to watch you two."

“This the spot. Remember to watch for the trip wire.”

“Forgot about that. You ever going to tell me what that’s about?”

“I don’t know Max. I think I’d like Mike to know first.”

“Why?”

“He needs to know some things about me... because... I think I might be in love with him.”

5. Fighting a Shiver

“Ok, truth or dare.” Max said with a sly look.

“Didn’t we do this the last sleepover?”

“Yes, but now there’s new stuff to work with.”

El sighed. “Truth.”

“Would you let Mike finger you?”

“For fuck’s sake Max, you went there first? What if I just let him feel up my girls first?”

“Ok, would you let him suck on your nipples?”

“Or feel them up Max? Did you even hear what I said?”

“Fine.” Max used a boring monotone voice, “Would you let Mike Wheeler feel up your breasts.”

“Through my top or underneath?”

“Oooh, girl, now you’re getting into it. Under.”

“Yes, with a qualifier. He’d have to kiss me first. Your turn. Truth or Dare.”

“Truth.”

“Do you like Lucas.”

“El... your kidding right? I’d drop to my knees and blow him in the

bathroom.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake Max. Get laid already. This is why I don’t like playing this game with you. It’s juvenile and clearly you need to masturbate... or something, just go do it in the bathroom.”

They both had two glasses of wine. They were both feeling the effects.

“El, if you were to go down on Mike, how would you do it?”

“Max!”

“Just curious. If we can’t have girl talk like this... especially when we’re a little drunk...”

“You know... you are right.”

So El described it in loving detail.

XXXXX

Max is sleeping beside me while I write this. I think she had a lot more to drink than I did. Well, I did too. I made sure she was hot and bothered with my oral sex description. It left me wondering if I’d even do half the things I described. I was drunk... I am drunk.

Anyway, she seemed to be in the bathroom a long time after that.

I confessed to her that I Think I might be in love with Mike. Everyone,

even Max has said that ‘everyone’ knew he loved me. They all certainly thought we were a couple.

He has made no indication that he likes me. I mean, he’s nice to me... maybe if I showed him some interest? Or just out right ask him?

Oh... wait a minute. What if he’s actually not interested in me? How am I going to deal with that? I’ll feel... well... stupid... and... empty.

I’ve been so engrossed in the acting career I don’t have that I’ve never had a boyfriend. I felt ok admitting Mike that he was my first kiss... dreamy interlude here... it was such a good kiss.

What if we were together and had a make-out session and it got really serious? Would I go to bed with him? I don’t know. I mean... I know that if we loved each other it would happen. It would be another physical expression of our love.

And if we really loved each other. I’d do everything I described to Max.

I need to talk to him.

XXXXX

El didn’t see Max or Mike all the next week. That was ok, she was super hormonal and she didn’t think any conversation with either of them would go ok. Besides she knew that Max was busy with Dustin and Lucas editing the videos, but she had no idea why she hadn’t run into Mike.

XXXXX

What's the best way to put this? I feel an ache. No not cramping, that's over now... and no not sexual... although... I haven't seen Mike all week. I'm worried about him. I don't know if he's ok.

Wait! I have his phone number. Maybe I'll call him and ask if... I don't know... maybe he wants to hang out or something?

'Hi Mike let's hang out or something.' Yep. Not too lame.

I could call him and see if he's ok? He's a nerd, it's not like him to miss school.

[later]

Ok, I called him!

He was in good spirits, as a matter of fact he said, "Ooh, bad move El, you called me on my cell, and now I have your phone number. I didn't even have to ask for it." We both laughed.

I asked why he wasn't in school. "Longer story El, but if you like you can come over Friday night, we can rip apart our take. Dustin was able to sneak me a copy before anybody else saw it. We can watch it for the first time together?"

He invented me over and there wasn't anyway I was going to say no. "Do you want me to bring anything over?" I asked him.

He was quite for a second and then he said... "Just those eyes." And hung up.

My heart is triple-hammer-pounding right now.

XXXXXX

El stood at the Wheeler's front door. The night was a little cool and she was fighting a shiver. She took a deep breath and knocked.

No answer.

She knocked again a little louder.

Still no answer.

XXXXX

I decided I was going all out, no holds barred, balls to the wall, as the guys say. I wore my tightest pair of jeans. It made her ass look good, but more importantly no camel's feet were hurt in the process. I put on one of my sexier bras. I wasn't going to be hiding the girls tonight. I had a white blouse on, tucked in. You could easily see my bra. I unbuttoned enough to show off tasteful cleavage... at least I thought so. I had a jade pendant that looked a little like an old arrowhead, it was just long enough to point right to my cleavage. I did everything I could to show myself off. This was either going to work, or be a spectacular fail whale and I'd end up going home crying.

And alone.

When there was no answer after I knocked, I felt a little deflated. Did Mike forget and he's not home? Or did he decide he really didn't want to watch it with me? Obviously his parents weren't home...

I called his cell and told him I was at the front door.

He answered, and the first thing he said was that he was sorry, as I was walking down the basement stairs, he came up to me with a wool blanket

and put it around my shoulders.

I told him that I wasn't that cold, he didn't look at me but said, "Maybe not... but your ah, two friends are."

He was right, my nipples could have cut glass. We both turned red. We couldn't look at each other at all. I'm not shy, but I didn't want him to see me... that way.

"My parents are away for the weekend, they took my little sister with them. Convenient, because I didn't want them to see us kissing..."

My heart stopped when he said that.

"Uh, um, on the tv. Remember?"

Right. That's what I was here for.

"And we are supposed to be brutal about this right? Tear it apart?"

I nodded.

The first time we watched it, I snuck a peak at Mike. His eyes were closed, he had a smile on his face. He was reliving the kiss.

Max did a beautiful editing job. The view encircled us, so you saw... you saw the love our two characters had. I got a lump in my throat watching it. Max had used parts from both takes, so as the scene moved around us, it looked like a simple kiss for a few seconds, and then a slightly hungrier one, our cheeks were moving because our tongues were.

The second time we watched it, Mike looked a little sad.

The third time we watched it... I saw a tear roll down his cheek.

"Mike... can you stop the video please." I wanted to find something wrong with it but I couldn't. I also couldn't watch Mike cry. Oh my God. I'm in love with him. I don't know how to tell him I want to be his.

He nodded, pressed a button on a remote. The torture was ended for now.

"Over the last two weeks I've talked to a lot of people. With more

than half of them, I just stood there and took some uninformed girl's vitriol... but... almost everybody I was in contact said that you liked me..."

He looked down. I think he was fighting his own shiver.

"Mike..." *I tried to keep my voice as gentle as possible.* "Why haven't you asked me out?"

He glanced up quickly at my hair. "I've never seen you with a guy... so..."

"That's not the real reason is it?"

A huge, sad sigh came from him. "No. I'll be honest with you. Remember that breakup scene we did?"

"The pretend breakup, yes."

"I... didn't want to have to go through that for real."

We were acting and his grief was palpable, to be honest, I can't imagine how'd he'd take a real breakup... and I guess... that's why he's never had a girlfriend and has been lonely through his teens.

"I have a crazy idea."

"What's that? he said, a slight frown on his face.

"What if we just *didn't* break up?"

Notes for the Chapter:

Ok, burying this here so no one will read it. I like jumping around. But I'll do that first without posting, I'll only keep one open at a time that's actually poisted (that's the dream)

Just as a teaser. This is what I'm working on (along

with the few open ones still going)

Rest of this story (at least two more chapters)

- Blindsided by Love (fun to write, but research needed)
- The Rebound Girl (back to young El and Mike)
- The Cat Was Talking Back (wasn't that a party :))
- Distant Hearts (edgier post-apocalyptic one)
- Crimes of the Heart (this was suggested, but I've made changes)
- The Loneliest El (another tribute to my favourite character.)
- The Nowhere Mike (So far: El is the one from "These Eyes..." Mike is a combination from "Learning to Love..." and "Entangled Kisses" but with a slight twist.)

No. I'm not Add. :)

6. The Only One

“Don’t say that El... don’t say that if you don’t really mean it.”

I looked over at the TV. “Did you feel that Mike? Did you feel it when we kissed... and again just now watching it.”

He looked into my eyes. His were dark, full of hope... and love... I could see that even now... it’s just the way he looks at me. “Yeah, I feel it. This kind of feeling doesn’t just work one way El. It can’t. Has to be both ways.”

“I *feel* it Mike.”

“I don’t want to watch us kissing anymore. I want to *feel* us kissing.”

This time we used our tongues and nobody could tell us to stop.

XXXXX

Mike’s cell phone rang funny.

He and El parted, a little saliva keeping them joined and made them both laugh. Mike ran his forearm across his mouth.

“Hello, Mom... I know who it is because I have a ring for all family members... I want to know if I can ignore a call or not... why would I

ignore your call? ...I don't know... maybe I have a girl over? ...you know mom... that kind of thing? ...as a matter of fact I do... thanks mom... good-bye mom."

"Next time tell your mom you are a fantastic kisser..."

"Mike?..." El looked at Mike timidly, she started to undo the top button of her blouse.

Mike put his hand over hers to stop her. "No El, don't think you need to do that because I need to see or... um... feel them."

"You don't want to?" El said, a little shocked.

Mike held up a finger... "Let's not talk crazy El. You are... beautiful... but if you asked me if I wanted to look at your boobs or your eyes. Well... eyes win out everytime."

El blushed and smiled. "You can't feel up my eyes."

"Of course not, that's what boobs are for... you know... if I can be a mouthbreather for a minute."

"But what if I get you... hot... and... aroused."

That stopped Mike. "I don't know El. I'd like to think I would respect your body." He chuckled. "I've never been in this situation before. I do have some self-control."

"I wanted to show you that I'm yours Mike. Body and soul. Especially soul."

"El... I want to be totally honest with you. I don't care about acting. I just wanted to be in a class where I might get to talk to you..."

"I suspected it was something like that."

They went back to kissing, eventually El lay back on the sofa, with Mike half on top of her. El started to breathe deeper and quicker.

After a few minutes of intense kissing, El gently put her hands on Mike's shoulders. He pulled back immediately.

“You ok?”

“Mike...” She was breathless. “We either have to stop everything *now*... or we have to keep going and *not* stop....”

“You mean... *all the way*?”

“Yes Mike. I *want* you. I want *you* to have me. I want us to be intimate...”

“El... we can't. I don't have any... protection. Although, we already acted out the pregnancy scene, that's the way I feel. It would be difficult for our families though.”

“Do you trust me Mike?”

“With all my heart. We are on the verge of I don't know... something bigger.”

“You don't need one.”

“You want me to... um... uh... pull out?”

“Never. Trust me... and take me to bed.”

XXXXX

Mike and I made love last night. Other girls might have written 'fucked', or 'screwed'. But that's not what we did. We made love. Was it hot and horny? Yes. Was it messy? Very. Did we talk dirty to each other? We would have made a porn star blush. Did we do everything? Well, everything I was comfortable with... I surprised myself. I would do anything for Mike.

Last night I knew I could quit acting. I'd sacrifice that for my soul to have peace.

When we were exhausted, and cooked out I asked Mike for a pair of his pajamas. I turned my back to him, he spooned me and put his arm around me.

I knew I'd be spending the night... I had to make an awkward call to my dad.. He could hear it in my voice.

He heard that I would be staying the night with the boy I loved.

XXXXXX

The next night Mike couldn't sleep. Not even after all the activity they had together.

Finally he sat up in bed.

"What's bothering you sweetie?" El didn't sound tired at all.

"Us..."

XXXXXX

When Mike said 'us' I almost panicked. Was he done with me? Now he was trying to let me down easy? I felt sick. I didn't know if I would make it to the bathroom before I puked my guts out.

"I love you and I don't know how to tell you how much. The physical side is very good, but it's not enough to let you know how I really feel."

I sat up with him and put my arms around his waist... my chin on his

shoulder...

I whispered, “That’s the great thing about soulmates Mike. I can tell when you look into my eyes. That’s a very powerful ability you have there. If that’s all that’s bothering you, then I want to reassure you. Soulmates don’t get together, they don’t break up. They just *are*. ”

“I am at peace. I feel like I can do anything I put my mind to. I have you backing me up.”

“You do... so I have one, sort of insecure thing I need to ask you... you... saw me naked...”

“Are you kidding me El? You could grace the centerfold of any of those magazines. I’m not quite sure what you see in me physically. I’m on the skinny side.”

I shrugged. “If it was your pecs or biceps I was into that would make me a little on the shallow side. There is something about guys that are very physical that I don’t like... I find very troubling. I can’t put my finger on it, but it’s probably some kind of narcissistic thing going with them. Probably not all of them, but for sure the ones I’ve had contact with. I’m really tired of those guys talking to my girls and not to me.”

“Guys don’t really have to put up with that.”

“You are the only one for me Mike. The only one.”

XXXXXX

“Ok, this is weird.” Mike was holding El’s hand as they walked down the hallway. They were going to spend the free period they had outside... away from the rest of the students... and mainly for kissing purposes.

“What is sweetie?”

“Every single person we pass is looking at us.”

“Good,” El said. “The guys are seeing that you might be getting lucky, and the girls are seeing that we are together. Instead of hiding in a corner, we can be more sociable.”

“Sure, I kind of feel like I’m putting you on display though.”

“I like to think I’m showing off my boyfriend.”

XXXXXX

Maybe this is how other girls feel and I’m just new to the party, but I am absolutely thrilled to have a boyfriend. It has taken the pressure off people wondering why I didn’t , no boyfriend, short hair. People have their own ideas.

My earlier fears that Mike would be a total asshole in private... he’s not like that. Not at all. How many shy guys are out there that would make the perfect boyfriend for any girl? ...and they never get a chance because they are scared to death to ask a girl out.

At least with all the movements out there, girls feel a little more empowered to take things into their own hands. Ok, I giggled at that, but I’m serious. If you like a guy, just ask him out instead of waiting. If he’s a muscle bound freakazoid, well that’s your choice, but you probably know what you are in for.

But if he’s shy... there’s a good chance he’s a nice guy, lonely, and he’ll be good to you... I don’t know. Maybe it’s just me that got... Mike... I love him so much. I’m going to call him right now and tell him that...

He cried! I didn’t mean to make him cry, he thanked me for the call, said

sorry he was acting so wimpy but... that he really loved me too.

I think I have decided that instead of being an actress... as backwards as it sounds for a modern girl...

I want to be a housewife.

7. Setting You Free

Notes for the Chapter:

This is the last chapter. It's weak.

As Max would say "it's a little derivative in parts."

Today, at the stroke of midnight, Mike asked me how long we had been going out.

My reply was prompt, "Three years, five months, three days."

We had been doing some roleplaying, at our apartment. Mike keeps telling me that it's to keep my acting skills up. I told him I was unlikely to get a role in a regular movie where the sexy nurse had to take the temperature of her patient... in all kinds of interesting ways.

It was fun though. Mike is always coming up with drama scenarios, and they usually end up with us having sex. I am a willing participant. Giggles here.

"That number is what I came up with too." He said.

"What are you thinking Mike?"

I wasn't nervous. Our relationship insecurities ended the first night we were together. Mike has been my dream come true. I honestly don't know what I would do without his love. I know for a fact Mike would be a mess without mine... thankfully neither of us have to find that out.

"I'm thinking of taking you up on your offer." He sounded serious...

A year ago, a talent agency guy saw Max's edit of our drama class kiss. He said he could put us in a movie. I knew that Mike didn't really want to do that, but I still had a smidgen of interest.

The talent guy asked if I could recreate that kiss. I told him that with Mike I could. Not some actor. I told him Mike wasn't interested in acting. He nodded. Said he'd get back to me.

He came back with two other people, I don't think the other guys were even old enough to shave. But the pitch they made... neither Mike or I could refuse. Except for one detail.

"Before you say no, listen to what they have to say. Agreed?" Both Mike and I nodded.

"First off, this business can suck the life out of you. But I'm not going to let it do that. Here's what we have in mind..."

The two young guys an idea for a video game line, for girls/women. They already had, orders for the game. Everyone wanted in on this. The two main problems they said was that, actors wanted big money, and residuals. But video game voice actors don't get that, there was this thing about units and back-end payments, blah blah, eyes glazed over, keep going.

What it came down to is they wanted to tap talent they knew was out there in the high schools. Acting, technical, artists, everything.

I jokingly suggested Max because that edit, and he told me she was already on board, but because of an NDA she couldn't say anything.

That probably meant that Lucas and Dustin were also involved. Anyway he said it takes a lot of talent to produce a good video game.

We would be paid up front for our likenesses, we would get residuals because they were independent and negotiated with SAG-ACTRA. He warned we might not make a lot because that was based on sales. But we would be paid upfront for our initial work.

The series was a coming of age story, the first one, Mike and I would play

childhood sweethearts, but eventually work our way up to more adult themes if the game gets serious sales.

My one stipulation that I would not do, with or without Mike was nudity. Nope. Not going to happen.

Long story short.

It was an incredible success, we can still go out in public without paparazzi, and with my girls, that was always a concern for me.

And then there was the money. So much so that I told Mike, we should live a simple life at the cabin, do whatever we wanted.

He didn't want to do just nothing. He said that we would go crazy. So when he said he would take me up on my offer, I was a little surprised.

"Really?"

"One condition."

"Done." I said.

He smiled at me, "you haven't heard it yet."

"Mike... done." I couldn't make it any clearer than that.

He shrugged. "Ok then... we'll get married this afternoon."

I don't think it's possible to faint from happiness... unless you are crying so much you hyperventilate.

Mike hates to see me cry. Laugh, I do too... he tells me I'm a beautiful cryer, and that usually makes me laugh. If it's too much though, it makes him cry and I hate doing that.

We didn't wait till the afternoon, we went down to the country clerk's and registered. I asked my dad if he would give me away... that felt right to both Mike and I.

XXXXX

El and Mike were walking through the woods. They were going to spend the weekend in the cabin. A sort of honeymoon.

Mike felt the tug on his hand. El and dropped to her knees... “Oh, no... how could I forget?”

Mike knelt down beside her, “Forget what El? What’s wrong?”

“You’ve given me a normal life for the last three years. I just pushed it to the back of my mind... where it should be.”

“El...?”

She pointed.

Mike has to squint. “Is that...? ...a tripwire?”

XXXXX

I had to tell him.

No normal girl has a tripwire around her cabin in the woods.

"I know we just got married... but if you don't want to be with me anymore... I... understand..."

Mike shook his head gave her a smile and said gently, "I don't think you can get rid of me that easily."

"There's more..."

I pointed to a tree, and I snapped it in half. "I have much more power than that."

Mike looked back and forth between me and the tree.

"If that's too much for you Mike... I understand... I will set you free."

"What? No, we just gave each other forever vows. Ok... " *He looked at the tree again, but he was smiling* "I didn't see that coming... at all."

And then he started grinning. "So... new roleplay idea... you are a superhero that seduces me and I can't do anything about it. After you have your way with me, you set me free. Recapture me... oh... I could go on."

I smirked at him.

It was going to be ok.